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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the following features as the most important in the development of adult education in Norway during the past 10-20 years: (1) a desire to obtain a more flexible understanding of when in a person's lifetime education can take place; (2) the acceptance of the adult's need for increased and more comprehensive education; (3) the demand for a more systematic follow-up of the adult's desire for education at a mature age; (4) the demand for equality between elementary education for children and youths, males and females, geographical locations, and more fairness toward the educationally disadvantaged, the handicapped, and other minority groups; and (5) the acceptance of the concept of "illiteracy" in the industrial countries. The paper concludes that adult education is still striving to attain full acceptance as an equal partner in a modern schooling system. Although an investment in education should be viewed similarly to an investment in roads and industry (and education of youths is usually viewed in this manner), only time will tell if adult education will be looked upon as a worthwhile investment in Norway. (KC)

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WHAT IS IT THAT THE HISTORIANS OF ADULT EDUCATION
ARE WRITING ABOUT - WHAT HAS INTERESTED THE PEOPLE ?

by Ole-Jørgen Woltmann - The Educational Organization
of the Conservative Party, Norway

With this question in mind and with a perspective of
10-20 years back in time, this paper points to and
discusses the following main features, among many
others, as the most important in the development of
Adult Education in Norway:

- a) A desire to obtain a more flexible understanding
of when in a persons lifetime, education can take
place.
- b) The acceptance of the adults need for increased and
more comprehensive education.
- c) The demand for a more systematic follow up of the
adults desire for education at a mature age.
- d) The demand for equality between elementary education
for children and youths, male and female, geo-
graphical situation and more fairness towards groups
with poor elementary education, handicapped and
other minority groups in the community.
- e) The acceptance of the concept "illiteracy" in the
industrial countries.

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WRITING ABOUT - WHAT HAS INTERESTED THE PEOPLE ?

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With this question in mind and with a perspective
of 10-20 years back in time, the following main
features, among many others, become apparant as
the most important in the developement of Adult
Education in Norway:

- a) A desire to obtain a more flexible understanding
of when in a persons lifetime, education can take
place. ("lifelong learning")
- b) The acceptance of the adults need for increased
and more comprehensive education, hereby further
education both in respect to profession and
community developement.
- c) The demand for a more systematic follow up of
the adults desire for education at a mature age.
- d) The demand for equality between elementary education
for children and youths, male and female, geo-
graphical situation and more fairness towards
groups with poor elementary education, handicapped,
and other minority groups in the community.
- e) The acceptance of the concept "illiteracy" in the
industrial countries also presents a challenge.

However to begin with, some basic information about
adult education with special emphasis put on its
developement in Norway.

History

In Scandinavia, adult education or "public enlightenment"
as it is also called, has historically very long
traditions.

In Norway the first pioneer work commenced already
in the middle of the 19th century, and became as time

passed an important element both in the farmers uprising, the labour movement, and the formation of a very strong alcohol abstinency movement.

"Public enlightenment" was traditionally only to a small extent trade related and was primarily directed towards general education and local cultural activities.

During and immediately after the second world war a strong will to build a new and better society after the country's liberation developed. In this there was also a dream of a continuation and strengthening of the traditonal "public enlightenment".

This formed the basis for many research studies which all concluded with the strong desire to put on equal terms adult education with general compulsory education.

Those who had the inclination and energy could acquire knowledge for knowledge's own sake, or if so desired qualify for a profession or retrain for a new jobb.

Study work became a means to enrich the mind, while simultaneously giving the opportunity to qualify oneself for working life. It was up to the individual to determine what he/she thought the most important and desirable.

In the late sixties and early seventies a debate commenced regarding "lifelong learning". This ascertained that the human being, to a much greater extent than previously believed, had a need for schooling both formal and informal, over a longer period of time than what was traditonally regarded as elementary education. In Norway this being to an age of nineteen.

The consequence of equalising adult education and normal elementary education is that the requirement of a final examination immediately after a continuous schooling, must yield to new ideas.

The possibilty must be given to document acquired knowledge without regard to how it has been obtained. Further more it must be possible to obtain full qualifications by means of part examinations.

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Great emphasis was given to the work performed by the voluntary organizations, and the special resources these organisations had to reach the public and through this stimulate adults to further education and schooling.

These organisations, totalling slightly over forty, covered the entire country and their membership totalled the Norwegian population several times over.

These thoughts actualised the question concerning a closer cooperation between the voluntary study - or "public enlightenment" organisations and the states schooling system.

In general the authorities were of the opinion that the schooling system should have the responsibility for all tuition which concluded with a full examination, while the voluntary organisations could play a valuable role where studies and schooling concluded with part examinations or where the accumulation of knowledge ended without an examination.

During the late sixties and early seventies this lead to a more concrete definition of adult education.

The Act of Adult Education

Norway is one of the few countries in Europe, which through legislation has regulated this area of the schooling system. The Act was passed in the Norwegian parliament 18th May, 1976, following a thorough preparation extending over a period of 10 years.

It began with the government white paper in 1964/65, which stressed the necessity for legislation, and which put on equal terms the schooling of adults with that of children/youths.

The hearing of this white paper showed unanimity within the political milieu regarding such an equality as well as the need for legislation.

The committee formed to prepare the draft was established in 1970, and they presented their proposal after two years of work.

This was then widely distributed for hearing both to organisations and among other fractions. The Ministry of Church and Education received several comments, differing widely, which resulted in a thorough revision before the final proposal was presented.

The Act was based on the governments general political goals regarding education. At the same time the Ministry of Church and Education coordinated the comments expressed in other white papers that were at this time also under consideration, i.e. The white paper on cultural activities and the white paper on further and higher education.

The Act's first paragraph repeats the main points regarding adult education as expressed by a unanimous Parliament.

"§1. Objectives

The purpose of Adult Education is to help the individual to attain a more meaningful life. This Act shall contribute to providing adults equality in access to knowledge, insight and skills which will promote the individuals endeavours to find their own values, and help in their personal development, and thus strengthen the basis for independent achievement and cooperation with others in work and community life."

The main goal was therefore to attain equality and personal development. The Act would give the possibility for the development towards equality between individuals and groups, male and female, young and old, disabled and sound and last but not least between various parts of the country.

The main aim with the Norwegian policy of education is, among others, to give the individual the possibility of personal development, both as independent achievement and as a participant in working and social life.

In the white paper great emphasis was made to enhance the opportunities for ever increasing groups of the population.

Further, the importance of realising the necessity to adapt the traditional schooling system to the ever increasing availability of informal schooling in society was stressed.

The need to view beyond the traditional age barriers in the schooling system was strongly emphasised and it was concluded that the individual must have the opportunity to be educated in a manner and at a time and place that was best suited.

The Act clarifies the sharing of responsibility between the established official schooling system and the voluntary study organizations which background was "public enlightenment"

The Act states that in order for such organisations to be approved as participants in adult education there must be a democratic structure based on individual or collective membership.

Finally the Act provided a system for funding which main aim was to stimulate the population to participate in educational activities at a mature age.

The main features of the development

In returning to the five main features of the development referred to introductorially, the following observations will supplement the picture:

- A) A desire to obtain a more flexible understanding of when in a persons lifetime, education should take place.

In the last 10/20 years there has been a slow development in this field in the direction of larger possibilities for adults to undertake education when they choose to.

The concept "lifelong learning" has now achieved an expanded meaning. Many obstacles which prevented the accomplishment of this goal are removed.

In 1981 a committee was formed to look into the concept "lifelong learning" and the results of which are expected to be presented during this year.

As mentioned earlier the need to view beyond the traditional age barriers in the school system was strongly emphasised in the Act on Adult Education. At the same time we know that adults do not have the same possibilities to utilize adult education. Important obstacles exist, such as: the lack of a motivating social background, low self esteem due to a weak educational background and/or poor results in early schooling, poor economy, heavy family obligations and of course the individual's ability for learning plays an important role. A great number of adults have also found the available education to be incompatible with their situation and interests.

The result of this has been that the adult education available has been used particularly by people who already have a relatively good education. They are motivated for the participation in the actual courses and have the ability to utilize them. The groups who are hindered in utilizing adult education, (usually through one or more of the reasons given above) are difficult to reach without specific policy aimed at reducing or removing the hindrances. Formal equality in the ability to utilize adult education without any supplementary policies appears to lead towards an increase in inequality. This must have consequences for the policy especially with regard to the financial arrangements. If such arrangements are to be effective tools in the work for equality, we need more systematic knowledge about which of the hindrances are most important for specific groups in relation to the different types of education offered.

- B) The next feature - the acceptance of the adults need for increased and more comprehensive education, hereby further education in respect to profession and community development.

The Act on Adult Education regulates the following activities:

- Voluntary studies in organisations and institutions which are eligible for subsidies.

- Elementary education at the primary and secondary levels which is especially organized for adults.
- Alternative types of elementary education for adults at all levels.
- Post-work education and short courses, not forming part of the elementary education, in secondary schools and institutions for higher education.
- Short-term courses for adults at "folk high schools".
- Vocational training for adults as part of the labour market policy.
- Training given in or in connection with a company.
- Other education offered for adults based on a special evaluation in each individual case.

The white paper underlined the difference between elementary education and post-work education. Elementary education i.e. primary school, complete or partial education at secondary and at higher levels, should give a fundament for self-managed "lifelong learning". Post-work education is used as a joint concept for recurring educational periods where adjustment, renewal and widening of the elementary education closely connected with the practical experience of the adults is the central idea.

Whatever is offered within regular elementary education, should be organized in such a way that it satisfies the need for alternating between education, work and other activities. An example of such combination studies is the so called High school for adults. Secondary education, which is especially organized for adults in this way, comes under the Law of Adult Education. Adults who so wish, shall have the right to participate in the regular course for youth offered at the secondary level. Such courses are organized under the Law of Secondary Education. §2 in that Act has been changed so that it corresponds to the Law on Adult Education which has been described above.

- C) The demand for a more systematic follow up of the adults desire for education at a mature age.

The pillar in such a systemisation is the preparation and thorough treatment which the Norwegian Act on Adult Education received.

The preparation which is described earlier, created a debate which again focused a widespread interest to adult education.

It created room for new ideas and a more expansive opening for the adults needs and wishes.

The political debate unveiled a broad agreement concerning the basic features , about goal and strategy, While disagreement arose surrounding the organization and which resources should be incorporated.

The chairman, at that time, of the Parliaments' Church and Education Committee, and later Culture and Science Minister, Lars Roar Langslet expressed in connection with the hearing of the Act in 1976 the following:

"Eleven years have passed since Parliament gave the go ahead for the equality of adult education with that of the education of children and youth, but first now have we created an Act which draws the necessary consequences of it. It marks an important reconstruction in our whole way of thinking in regard to adult education. Learning is not something one is finished with in ones youth. For more and more people, education in schools and courses will be a natural chapter in their existence through the better part of their lives. Either through a pause in their professional accomplishments or in their leisure time. Already today there is an impressively large sector of the population who seek adult education courses. This, however is just a beginning. The offer should be so large and varied that it gives all adults the opportunity to further education in regard to their interests and needs. Not least it is important to give the opportunity to those in the community who did not receive the academic possibilities they wished for during childhood. I say this in order to underline how very important

this work, which we have discussed today is, and how broad agreement there is concerning central goals."

Ten years after the passing of the Act it can be concluded that it has had a great influence on development, but that there has not been sufficient will to put in the necessary means to accomplish the intentions.

It is clear that in the 1970's too high, unrealistic expectations were created with the result that the disappointment and frustration were greater when these expectations were not met.

Much of the debate was concerned with whether or not adult education should give qualifications. Whether adult education could be called useful or not, also as time passed became a theme for debate. The background for this being the attempt to limit the governmental costs related to adult education.

Further discussion of this development is found in the enclosed special edition of "Nordisk Tidsskrift for folkbildning og vuxenundervisning" on "Financing adult education".

- D) The demand for equality between elementary education for youths and children, male and female, geographical situation and more fairness towards special minority groups.

These fundamental demands of equality are as mentioned central goals both in the preparation and in the Act itself.

If these problems are scrutinised it will be quickly concluded that the question of equality is a matter of priority and the distribution of existing possibilities

The concept of equal rights encompasses a very large spectre, from the relationship between adult education and the established compulsory schooling (elementary education) via equality of age and gender and to

the equality of special minority groups.

The object of the Act was to give all groups more equal possibilities to put into use the offers available and adapt these, and through this obtain a result.

These were very ambitious political intentions and can be summarized as follows:

1. Those who wish education should receive it, in other words the demand should be met. This principally means an opening for everyone and supply and demand (the free market) the only controlling mechanism.
2. Those who have the weakest basic education previously and/or are in a position of small means shall receive priority. It is a political definition as to who has the strongest educational need, in regard to the goal of equality.

The Act does not establish the right to adult education but limits itself to "helping the individual" and "contributes to providing" as stated in the Act's first paragraph. To create the possibility for equal rights there has been for the usual preferentially treated groups, established a grant, which has it's own paragraph in the Act. (§24) This paragraph reads:

§24. Special Grants

In addition to the normal subsidies mentioned in §§ 17, 18, 19, and 20, the Ministry may within the limits of Parliament's appropriation of funds, support special adult education provisions. Priority shall be given to efforts to further equality and democratisation, with special emphasis on:

1. Provisions for handicapped persons, persons with particularly weak basic education and persons with particularly heavy family obligations, may have state grants up to 100% of approved expenses. Further rules will be issued by the Ministry.

2. Courses of at least five days' duration for representatives in industry (shop stewards of both sexes) shall be granted a state subsidy of 50% of the approved expenses. The grant shall be limited to cover participation for 2 per 100 members of an employees' organisation each year. Further rules will be issued by the Ministry.
3. Reduction of participants' costs (cp. §§ 17,18 and 19) for special educational provisions and/or special social groups.
4. Contact work (out reach activities) and the development of educational provisions designed to meet the needs of special groups.
5. Research and development work related to activities within the scope of this Act.

In the regulations of the Act this is expanded upon as follows:

Persons who because of deficient knowledge and abilities have a difficult environment and/or are stunted to a large extent in their family life, work or other fundamental community activity shall have priority, hereby:

- handicapped
- persons with a very weak elementary education
- refugees and foreign workers and their families
- persons with special family obligations.

As in the previous item we conclude with the comparison between the ideal goal and the granting system. The contribution perhaps especially to the named groups demand both resources and the will for new thinking and not least "experimentation" to reach farther afield. The granting system as it is today gives very limited possibilities for this.

- E) The last developement feature, namely the acceptance of the concept "illiteracy" also in industrial countries represents a challenge to the educational system.

The problem with illiteracy has during the post wars years been considered as a problem exclusively in the developement countries. The fight against illiteracy has among others been one of the priority tasks of UNESCO since its founding in 1948.

During the past 10/20 years this has been reversed in as much as the society's developement has contributed to a more varied view on the requirements to reading and writing abilities.

The concept "functional illiteracy" which includes a form of deficient reading and writing ability so that it is not possible to function in a modern society, has been made the object for investigation to determine to which extent this form of handicap exists.

The definition "functional illiteracy" is basically a relative concept.

An individual characterised as a functional illiterate need not necessarily be one without reading and writing ability. It is the need seen in realtion to the society's requirements which is decisive for this evaluation.

How complex the community is, is the factor that decides what knowledge and abilities , and at what level, an individual must master before he can function satisfactorily.

The defintion is applied to people with upbringing and background in the society in question.

The mobility within and between different countries can lead to the fact that individuals who are not characterised as illiterate in their own culture will be so thought of in their new society.

Work-seeking immigrants to North Europe has undoubtedly widely contributed to the fact that illiteracy among

adults in the industrial countries came to light.

Amongst these immigrants there are two groups:

- those who were illiterate in their home countries.
- those who became illiterate in their new country, because they must read and write using a different alphabet.

Common to both groups is that they must learn a new form of spoken and written language and adjust to a new way of life.

This similarity represents a significantly different problem in the schooling of immigrants in comparison with the schooling of illiterates from our own country.

In Norway in 1985/86 there was carried out a multi-media project called "Norwegian in Practice" - a programme for adults with reading and writing difficulties.

It is calculated that around 10% of the population has this form of handicap, but only few will admit to this openly. Those who have this problem often try to conceal it and therefore avoid all situations where reading and writing will be necessary.

Because of this many with reading and writing difficulties become inferior in regard to managing in working life and community life in general.

With the project "Norwegian in Practice" the aim was:

- * through radio and television to make the problem of reading and writing commonplace, to those affected in particular and the public in general.
- * To reach the target groups with an offer of instruction and schooling.
- * to pave the way for a contact-body for the distribution of information and instruction/schooling locally.
- * to prepare teaching aids.

The programmes were sent in the spring of 1986 and it

is still too soon to form any conclusions concerning participation and successfulness of the project. One impression which has been formed is a very large response to the telephone-answering programmes, and a general greater understanding and acceptance of the problem. The project will be followed up later in 1986.

Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to bring forth the most typical development features concerning adult education in Norway during the past 10/20 years.

There are of course many other aspects which could have been looked into, but the areas referred to cover some of the new impulses which have been brought to light.

Adult education is still striving to attain full acceptance as an equal "partner" in a modern schooling system.

Financially an investment in education should be viewed in the same way as an investment in factories, roads etc., but contrary to the latter type of investments, an investment in education gives a dividend both in regard to private economy and as an advantage for the whole community.

This is accepted in relation to the community's effort in regard to children and youths up to a certain age.

Only time will tell if the next generation will look upon adult education as a worthwhile investment.

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